

The Plot, the Preparation and the Pieces of Silver

📖 Matthew 26:1-16

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Tonight we enter the final section of Matthew's gospel. This is indicated by the introductory words of 26:1 which Matthew has used five times now, **When Jesus had finished** (και εγενετο οτε ετελεσεν ο Ιησους; cf 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1 and 26:1). This formula was used by Matthew under the inspiration of the Spirit to set off each narrative followed by discourse section. The narrative provides the context for the discourse, which is the teaching. Matthew records more of Christ's teaching than any other Gospel writer. Each of the narratives followed by discourse sections builds part of Matthew's argument that the kingdom was offered to the nation Israel, rejected by the nation Israel and postponed until a future nation of Israel repents. The first discourse is the *Discourse on Kingdom Righteousness*, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. This discourse sets the criteria for the nation's entrance into the kingdom as righteousness. The second discourse is the *Discourse on Kingdom Missions*. This discourse is the commissioning of disciples to testify to the nation of Israel of the kingdom's nearness. The third discourse is the *Discourse on Kingdom Postponement*. This discourse teaches that in light of the nation of Israel's rejection of the King the kingdom will now be postponed and a period of preparation will take place prior to the kingdom's arrival. The fourth discourse is the *Discourse on Kingdom Greatness*. This discourse explains how a disciple during this age of preparation can prepare by humble service to be great in the kingdom to come. The fifth discourse is the *Discourse on Kingdom Coming*. This discourse explains the circumstances in the world just prior to the King returning in His kingdom and how both Jews and Gentiles can be prepared for His arrival so they are granted entrance and reward.

The final section is 26:1-28:21 and it is narrative only. There is no discourse following. It is a fitting conclusion to all that has preceded since it narrates the betrayal, the last Passover, the institution of the Lord's Supper to be practiced during the period of preparation, the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, the arrest, the trials, Peter's denials, Judas' remorse, the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection and the great commission as the marching orders for the period of preparation. So, as you can see, there is still a lot to come and so we won't be finishing any time too soon. Toussaint said, "All that remains is the work of the Messiah to provide the means whereby those who exercise faith in Him may enter His kingdom. This work, the death and resurrection of the King, is recounted very succinctly by Matthew...these last events form a fitting conclusion to his book since Jesus here

moves through defeat unto victory.”¹ We need to remember here that what happens here, as devastating as it seems, is not a defeat but a victory.

By way of review, remember that we are in the Final Week of Jesus and we have been in the final week since Matt 21:1. This chart reflects my understanding of the events of this week. Before the week, Jesus and His followers had travelled from the Galilee to Jerusalem for Passover. They had taken the route along the eastern side of the Jordan River, crossed over, passed through the two Jericho’s and made their way up to Jerusalem. They had arrived at Bethany on Saturday night where John 12:1 records they had dinner with Mary, Martha and the recently raised Lazarus with others present. On this occasion Mary anointed Him with a very costly perfume and Judas took offense at what he considered a waste of money. Jesus stayed at Bethany each night and made His way to and from Jerusalem throughout the week. On Sunday, Mark 11:11 records that when He entered Jerusalem He looked around the temple and then left. On Monday, Matt 21:1 records that He entered Jerusalem in a Triumphal procession but the crowds were divided on His Person. On Tuesday, Matt 21:12 records that He cursed the fig tree, entered Jerusalem and cleansed the temple of the money changers. On Wednesday, Matt 21:23 records that He silenced the Herodians, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, pronouncing woe on them and judgment on the temple. As He departed to return to Bethany the disciples were confused as to whether He really pronounced judgment on the temple. As they walked they pointed out the beautiful temple buildings still unfinished hoping for clarification. In that context, He confirmed that the temple would be destroyed, not one stone would be left upon another that would not be cast down. This prompted them to ask what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age. Jesus’ answer is that there will be many signs right before the end of the age but the sign of His coming is a bright light in the sky that issues forth His sudden arrival in judgment. Those living in that time need to be prepared with faith for salvation and kingdom entrance and with humble service for rewards and a rich entrance into the kingdom.

That was all Wednesday of the final week. We now continue with more events on that Wednesday as the timing note in 26:2 confirms; **two days** before **the Passover**. The **Passover** in mind is the Judean Passover, which occurred in AD33 on a Friday. Though not everyone agrees on the year or the day of this Passover, the best view is that Jesus was crucified in AD33 on a Friday. It was this day that He would fulfill the Feast of Passover as the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Since verse 2 tells us they were **two days** from that day this was the same Wednesday that He pronounced woe on the Pharisees, judgment on the temple and delivered the Olivet Discourse. Another notable occurrence on this day is now stated; this was the day the leadership of Israel plotted to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him.² Before we look at the details of the plot Jesus predicts His own crucifixion in verse 2 saying, **the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion**. This is the fourth time He has predicted His own death (cf 16:21; 17:23; 20:18-19; 26:2). The word **handed over** is the frequent *παραδομι* and is especially used of the betrayal by Judas.³ Judas’ betrayal is probably in view, since it is the subject of the following verses, even though we do not know how Matthew accessed this information. So here is a fascinating contrast between the King’s plans to be handed over and the religious leaders plans to destroy Him. Note that

the King predicts that in two days He will be **crucified** but the leader's plan in verse 5 was to kill Him sometime after "the festival," several days later after most of the people had returned home. Whose plans came to pass? Jesus' plans. Why? Because Jesus was in total control of the timing of these events. Jesus was sovereign over His own death. Constable said, "This irony points out Jesus' sovereign control over the affairs that led to His death, and it is an example of masterful narrative composition."⁴

In 26:3 we see the leadership gathering for the evil plot. **Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas...**The religious leadership of Israel are highlighted because they led the way in destroying the Messiah. The **chief priests were** from among the Sadducees. The **elders of the people** were representatives of the people from among the Pharisees. The **high priest** at the time was a man named **Caiaphas**. Rome controlled at the time and so he was appointed by Rome, whereas the Jews considered one who held the office of high priest to remain in that office until death. This created a problem because Caiaphas' father Annas had been appointed high priest years before but deposed by Rome. In the minds of the Jews Annas was still the high priest and yet Caiaphas was the official high priest and so in practice they both had authority but Rome only recognized the authority of **Caiaphas**. The plot to destroy Messiah was hatched in **the court of...Caiaphas**. The reason this is pointed out is to show the injustice and wickedness of the leadership of Israel. As the high priest of Israel, **Caiaphas** was to be the most holy, righteous and just man, but the plot was hatched in his court and he was at the head of the plot!

Now even though Caiaphas and the leadership of Israel hatched the plot to destroy Messiah this does not excuse the people for their role in the plot. Note that it says **the elders of the people**. That means the **elders** were representative **of the people**. Therefore, the elder's desires were representative of the people's desires. The majority wanted to get rid of Him. The picture is of a generation of Israel that was planning to do away with **Jesus**.

In 26:4 we see the means, **and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him**. Notice **by stealth**. They had already wanted to seize Him publicly, but they wouldn't because they feared the people (21:46). They had also already tried to trap Him doctrinally, but He ended up trapping them (22:15-46). Their only remaining option was to **seize Him by stealth**. This was illegal. What they are planning to do is murder.

In 26:5 the plan was set but the timing was still being discussed. **But they were saying, Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people**. In other words, it would not be politically expedient. Their political careers were on the line and they did not want any uprisings as this would bring them into conflict with Rome. So **not during the festival**. The festival included Passover and Unleavened Bread. Passover was one day, Unleavened Bread continued for another seven days, the total of which is eight days. During that time Josephus records a number of sacrifices that would be sufficient for about a million Jews. With that many people present any attempt to seize Jesus publicly would probably result in **a riot...among the people**. Jesus was a very divisive person. He did not come to unite people; He came to divide people; a mother from her daughter, a

father from his son and so forth and so on. The reason He is divisive is because He is righteousness and people are sinful. Only those who align with His righteousness by faith are united to Him. The rest are opposed to Him. The leadership of Israel did not want this division to result in a **riot**. It was not good for their political careers. They were more concerned with their political reputation than the injustice they were about to execute. Therefore, they planned to wait until after **the festival**. Since Passover and Unleavened Bread together took up at least nine days they planned to wait at least another ten days from Passover. And so while they planned to seize Him by stealth and kill Him they did not know how they would accomplish it until Judas came along and volunteered to betray Him. In any case, the major teaching of 26:1-5 is the contrast between Jesus' control over the entire situation and the vile corruption and deceit of the religious leadership of Israel. They plan to seize and kill Him but He is Lord over the coming events. This demonstrates that He is indeed the King who is sovereign, giving Himself for the sin of the world voluntarily and yet at the same time that the humans involved in killing Him were not alleviated of their responsibility for His death.

In 26:6 we are taken to a prior event during the final week of Jesus. This event set the stage for Judas' betrayal. On your chart of the Final Week of Jesus, this event occurred on the previous Saturday night when He dined with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. Here we are told that this dining event occurred **at the home of Simon the leper**. This is a **leper** whom He had previously healed. In 26:7 we read of a key event that happened that night at his home; **a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume. And she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table**. The woman is not named by Matthew but John says the woman was Mary. The reason Matthew does not name the woman is because that is not his concern. Who she was is unimportant to his argument. Matthew's argument is to contrast the woman's attitude toward Jesus with the disciple's attitude toward Him. He further used the situation to remind them of His crucifixion by stating in verse 26 that she was preparing His body for burial. Now most don't think she really understood that she was preparing His body for burial but Edersheim said, "Jesus may have told her, as He had told the disciples, what was before Him in Jerusalem at the Feast, and she would be far more quick to understand, even as she must have known far better than they, how great was the danger from the Sanhedrin. And it is this apprehension of the mystery of His death on her part, and this preparation of deepest love for it...which made her deed so precious, that wherever in the future the Gospel would be preached, this also that she had done would be recorded for a memorial of her." For my part I think she understood that He was going up to Jerusalem to be crucified and she knew His value but I don't think she considered herself as preparing his body for burial. Now, after pouring out the perfume verse 8 says **the disciples were indignant**. The contrast is clear; they did not recognize His value but she did. They did not have spiritual eyes to appreciate Him but she did. They were still unbelieving but she was believing. Now what she did is unclear to most 21st century western readers. What is this alabaster vial of very costly perfume. Matthew does not specify how costly or the kind of perfume, but the parallels in Mark 14:5 and John 12:5 tell us it was a vial of pure nard, probably from India, that weighed twelve ounces and was worth about 300 denarii, which was an entire year's wages. Matthew says that **she poured it on**

His head but John adds the feet so that it was from head to toe that she poured this vial of very expensive oil. Pentecost said, "Because the anointing oil was so expensive...such gifts were given to kings." And how fitting, because He is a great King.

Now this act led to a strong response by the disciples in 26:8-9. **But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor."** The parallel in Mk 14:4 says "some" of them were indignant, not all of them, and that they were talking about this amongst themselves and then began "scolding her." In John 12:5 we learn that Judas Iscariot led the way in scolding her and that the reason had nothing to do with giving to the poor but rather because he was a thief and wished she had sold it and given the money to Jesus so that it would go in the money box which he kept and he could pilfer from it. The other disciples were not thieves like Judas but simply did not understand the significance of Jesus.

In 26:10 we are told that **Jesus** was **aware of this**. He was aware of it because He overheard them discussing it amongst themselves. The parallel in John 12:7 seems to indicate that He also overheard them scolding her because He said, "Let her alone..." Since they did not understand the significance of what she had done He **said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me.** He then explains why what she had done was more valuable than what they suggested could have been done. **For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.** His explanation is built on the concept of time. They will always have **the poor** among them; but they will **not always have Him**. The parallel in Mark 14:7 says that since they will always have the poor among them then they "can do good to them" whenever. But His time was short and there was not much time to do good to Him. The contrast is between the woman who realized that His time was short because she truly understood that He was to be crucified, and the disciples who did not realize this even though He had told them multiple times. The contrast is between a woman with spiritual insight and His disciples who lacked spiritual insight. The fact that the women are more spiritually with it becomes a sub-theme during the events of the death, resurrection and appearances of Christ, and that seems to hold for much of history.

In 26:12 He uses this as an opportunity to remind them of His soon crucifixion. **For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.** The parallel in John 12:7 says preparing a body for burial was a custom. However, usually the preparation custom occurred after the death, not before. However, J. Vernon McGee made this interesting observation, "In the Gospel records I read that on the morning of that first day of the week other women came to the tomb of Jesus to anoint His body for burial. I have a question to ask you: Did they put their ointment on the body of Jesus? No, He wasn't in that tomb—He was risen. Mary alone had the privilege of anointing Him."⁵ Therefore, what was done here before His death was done because it could not be done after His death, since His body would not see decay but He would be raised. And so another significance of this event is that she prepared His body for burial six days before He would die and be buried.

Now, in 26:13, He commends her for this act saying, **Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.** They had scolded her but He commended her. Now she may not have not understood the full significance of what she had done, but I do think she understood He was soon to be killed, and the Lord used it as an opportunity to remind the disciples of His soon crucifixion by means of the preparation of His body for burial six days in advance. She was quick to believe but the disciples were slow to believe in all that the prophets had spoken. Now when He says **this gospel** He is probably not talking about “the gospel of the kingdom” since the kingdom was no longer “at hand,” but rather about the gospel of the crucifixion, that there is life in His name and entrance into life in the kingdom to come. Accompanying this gospel would be a memorial of what she had done. And how this has been fulfilled in history is by it’s being captured in the Scriptural record where it can be accessed and talked about as we have done tonight.

Like the first teaching in 26:1-5 contrasted Jesus’ plans with the leadership of Israel’s plans so the teaching in 26:6-13 is another contrast. This time the contrast is between the woman’s understanding of His true value and impending death with the disciple’s failure to understand His true value and impending death. In reality by pouring a year’s salary worth of anointing oil on Him she wasted nothing at all but did a great deed, so great that her deed would be written down alongside the gospel in the annals of Scripture as a testimony to her understanding of His inestimable value.

Now we move to Judas in 26:14 and here we are to understand that the connection between what the woman did and what Judas did is that what she did in pouring the perfume over Jesus was the pivotal event that led to his decision to betray Jesus. Now what exactly it was that led Judas to betray Jesus is debated. Walvoord said that it was Jesus’ failure to rebuke the woman that led to Judas’ decision to betray. He said, “That Jesus permitted it without rebuke was to Judas Iscariot the final evidence that led him to question that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and the verses which follow record his covenant to betray Jesus.”⁶ However, Toussaint said that it was Jesus’ rebuke of the disciples that sealed Judas’ decision saying, “...the rebuke of the Lord was the occasion for the action of Judas described here.” In either case something happened that played the pivotal role in Judas final decision. However, his decision was not immediate. This was Saturday night. His decision to betray was the next Wednesday. So he thought about it for four days and then decided to make a deal with the leadership of Israel. Probably he thought that since he had missed out on the money he could have pilfered from the perfume, he could at least now make some money. It reminds us of Jesus’ teaching that man cannot worship both God and money. Now the entire account of the transaction is so brief, just three verses, that it is probably a literary feature designed to depict the rapidity of the transaction. In 26:14 we read it, **Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?” And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.** Now this deal was made on Wednesday, as verse 2 noted, two days before Passover, on the very day that the chief priests and elders of the people gathered in the court of Caiaphas, the

high priest. This is not coincidence, this is providence. The picture is that Judas arrived not long after they had decided "to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him." So while they had planned to wait until after the festivities Judas' soon arrival probably seemed to them to be an answer to prayer! In verse 15, how much did they agree to pay him? **thirty pieces of silver**. How much money was this? Not much. Nothing compared to the amount the woman anointed Him with. Pentecost said, "The thirty pieces of silver which Judas agreed to accept in payment...was a small price for the Sanhedrin to pay in order to expedite their plot." In Exod 21:32 thirty pieces of silver was the amount of money one had to pay if his ox accidentally gored another's slave to death. Therefore, Judas' valuation of Jesus was that He was worth nothing more than a common slave.

Now that the Messiah would be sold for thirty shekels of silver was prophesied by Zech 11:12 so that Judas was fulfilling prophecy. **"I said to them, "If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!" So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages."** In other words, how much was the Messiah worth? Not more than a common slave. And that is how much Judas sold Him for. Actually, it is not entirely clear here that this prophecy was being fulfilled because it is not an exact quote of Zech 11:12 but it does become clear in 27:9 and the verbal similarities here probably argue for that being the proper understanding.

Now 26:16 tells us that **from that day on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus**. The Greek word translated **began looking** is in the imperfect tense referring to an ongoing action in the past. It is probably an inceptive imperfect, emphasizing the beginning of the time being the time the money was weighed out, which was probably when he cut the deal. The point is that Judas was motivated by money. He worshipped money and He would betray the Messiah for money. Now what he actually agreed to do was far more than just identify Him. We all know about what's coming in the garden of Gethsemane when he gives Jesus the fatal Judas kiss, but the Sanhedrin didn't need help identifying Him. They had seen Him teaching in the Temple day after day that week. They knew Him very well and had tried to seize Him before. What they did not know was how they might seize Him secretly. They did not know His secret movements, His favorite places, etc...which was required to avoid public disapproval and preserve their political reputations. Therefore, what Judas was agreeing to was providing insider information that would result in a secret arrest, and he was looking for this opportunity from the day he received the thirty pieces of silver. But even more than that Pentecost said he was agreeing to much more under Roman law. "Judas agreed to fulfill a point of Roman law, a necessary requirement if the Sanhedrin was to proceed with their plot to execute Christ. A person could not be brought to trial before a Roman court until an indictment had been officially lodged against him, charging him with a crime. This indictment had to be signed by witnesses who...agreed to appear in order to give testimony for the prosecution against the accused. Thus Judas offered himself as a witness against Christ." And he did so for just 30 pieces of silver.

So the teaching here is how Judas came to betray Jesus. The pivotal event was the woman anointing Him with a very costly perfume. Judas did not value Jesus as the woman did but valued the money far more. But Jesus had already said, "You cannot worship God and money." And that is a truth worth holding on to.

In conclusion, in 26:1-5 we have Jesus' plans contrasted with the leadership of Israel's plans. "When Jesus had finished all these words" signals the final narrative in Matthew's gospel. In 26:2 the King predicts on Wednesday that He would be betrayed over for crucifixion after two days, which is Friday. In 26:3 the leaders of the nation Israel gather on behalf of the nation Israel in the very court of the most righteous and just man in the whole nation, the high priest Caiaphas, in order to plot together to seize Jesus secretly and kill Him in order to salvage their precious political careers. In 26:5 the key to the plot was to accomplish it after the festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread. But the way things worked out was according to Jesus' prediction, not their plans, because He must fulfill Passover as the Passover Lamb. In 26:6-13 we have the woman's valuation of Jesus contrasted to the disciples and another prediction of the soon crucifixion. In 26:6 we are taken to an event on Saturday night in Bethany, at the home of Simon, the leper, who had been healed. On that night 26:7 tells us a woman came to Him with a very costly perfume and poured it on His head. Elsewhere we are told this was Mary and that she also poured it on His feet. In 26:8 the disciples were indignant and we are told elsewhere they discussed this waste among themselves and that Judas led them some of them in scolding her. In 26:9 the reason set forth is that she could have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor and elsewhere we are told that Judas wished she had sold it and given the money to Jesus so that it would go in the money box which he pilfered regularly. In 26:10 Jesus had overheard the discussion and scolded and rebuked them for bothering her for doing a good deed to Him. His reasoning in 26:11 related to time. They had much time to do good to the poor but they did not always have Him. In 26:12 the further explanation is because His death was so near what she did was prepare His body for burial, something that would never happen after His death because of resurrection. In 26:13 He commends her by attaching what she did with the proclamation of the gospel. Lastly, 26:14-16 connects what she did with Judas' final decision to betray Him. 26:14 says that Judas made his decision to go to the chief priests. This happened four days later, on Wednesday after the leadership in verse 2 had planned to seize Him by stealth and kill Him. They must have viewed this as an answer to prayer. In 26:15 Judas was willing to betray Him for thirty pieces of silver, the cost of a dead common slave, he was worthless in their sight. And in 26:16 we are told that Judas began from that day forward to look for an opportunity to betray Him to them in secret.

What can we learn? First, that Jesus is the Lord of history. He controls whatsoever comes to pass. He predicted the very day of His betrayal until crucifixion. But second, at the same time men are responsible for their choices. The leadership of Israel are responsible for killing Him. These are two truths that are contrary to both fatalism and chance and they must both be held in proper balance. God has created a responsible history. Third, Jesus' value is infinite. The woman poured an extremely costly perfume on Him. But fourth, not all men recognize His value, even some believers. Those who do will be commended. Fifth, you cannot worship both God and money. Judas worshipped money. He was willing to betray the Son of Man for the measly cost of a dead slave. Money is

something you need to get through this world but it is not that big a deal. He who has Messiah is the richest man and He who treasures riches, already has his reward...

¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 295.

² Cf Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 91-92.

³ Cf BDAG, 762.

⁴ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 26:1.

⁵ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 164.

⁶ John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 209.